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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 003673

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DHAHRAN SENDS
PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2016
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR KIRF SA
SUBJECT: QATIF MUNICIPAL COUNCIL MEMBER CONTINUES TO
ORGANIZE

REF: RIYADH 1741

Classified by Consul General John Kincannon for reason 1.4
(d).

¶1. (C) In a conversation with the CG on April 29, Isa Al-Muzel, an elected member of Qatif's municipal council, described his work at the council as "going well, but frustrating." He said that the biggest problem council members faced at the moment was rooting out institutionalized corruption in various municipal contracts. "Everyone knows there is corruption," Al-Muzel noted, but said the municipality's bureaucracy is engaging in Kafka-esque maneuvers to prevent council members from obtaining the documents that would assist them in investigating the corruption: "We ask for a file, they ask us to send them a letter, we send them a letter, they say it must be approved, we ask who must give the approval, and they say they don't know, they are checking." Al-Muzel expressed confidence that the council members' efforts to investigate corruption would ultimately bear fruit. He noted that Prince Mansour bin Miteb, the Deputy Minister of Municipalities, whom Al-Muzel described as "nice and humble," was assisting their efforts.

¶2. (C) A priority of the Qatif council members, Al-Muzel continued, was obtaining the repeal of a special local ordinance prohibiting construction of basements that were larger than 50 percent of the area of the house. In other Saudi cities, according to Al-Muzel, homeowners can construct basements that are as large as the size of their homes; the purpose of the special local ordinance is to stop Shi'a from building husseiniyas. (Note: The SAG will not license husseiniyas, so Shi'a build majlises that serve as husseiniyas in their homes. End note.)

¶3. (C) Al-Muzel then described his efforts to found new grassroots networks in Seihat, his municipal council district. He recently organized his own local election to elect seven representatives from Seihat's neighborhoods to serve as an advisory council to him. Displaying a bit of Kafka-esque maneuvering himself, he told the CG, "Some local residents came to me and asked 'What right do we have to conduct a local election?' I told them, 'If anyone asks you who said we could hold this election, tell them Isa Al-Muzel.' And if the Saudi government ever comes to me and asks who gave me permission to hold a local election, I will tell them, 'The People.'"

¶4. (C) Finally, Al-Muzel condemned a recent incident in which a female Shi'a student at King Saud University in Riyadh was reportedly taken and beaten by the mutawa'. According to Al-Muzel the student, who is from Seihat and is a distant relative of his, had discussed with a fellow

student, a Sunni with whom she thought she was developing a friendship, the doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shi'a beliefs. This attempt at inter-faith dialogue apparently did not go well, and the Sunni girl reported the Shi'a girl to the mutawa'. The mutawa' abducted and beat the Shi'a student, Al-Muzel continued, accusing her of "confusing" the Sunni student with "false doctrines." Al-Muzel said he would welcomed national and international publicity about this case. (Note: This incident, which happened April 25, caused an uproar in the Shi'a community. Rasid News Network (www.rasid.org), an Internet news service run by the Saudi Shi'a, carried a report on the case. End note.)

15. (C) Comment: Al-Muzel's comments about the Qatif municipal council and his attempt to organize neighborhoods in Seihat square with what we heard from Jafar Al-Shayeb, the council's president (reftel). The council's attempt to repeal the special local ordinance is another example of Shi'a leaders using all available levers to loosen the restrictions on their community. End comment.

16. (SBU) Bio note: Al-Muzel was born in 1956. Like many politically active Shi'a of his generation, he spent much of the period from the late 1970s to 1993 in exile, the majority of it in the United States, where he initially went as a SABIC employee for training. He has a master's degree in political science from the University of Texas at Arlington. Al-Muzel was a member of the small delegation of exiled Shi'a leaders who negotiated in 1993 with King Fahd for the group's return, and he was recently part of delegation of five Shi'a that had an audience with Interior Minister Naif. He is married to Amal Al-Maskeen; they have three daughters, all AmCits, and one son, Abdullah, who has only Saudi nationality. Al-Muzel owns a private consulting business but

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seems to spend much of his time on political activities. End bio note.

(APPROVED: KINCANNON)
GFOELLER